

Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project

**ACHIEVING QUALITY THROUGH ASSESSMENT:
THE EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATODOS – IEQ II IN HONDURAS**

IEQ undertaken by:

American Institutes for Research

in collaboration with

The Academy for Educational Development

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Juárez and Associates, Inc.

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March 2001

Contract #HNE-I-00-97-00029-00

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INTRODUCTION

At Educatodos/IEQ¹, we believe that quality involves (a) relevant learning for life, as well as (b) efficient and effective processes. Although our aspiration is to achieve quality, quality is not a tangible goal, but more of a process that draws our endeavors closer to being of value in the terms that we have defined.

Thus, the position that we would like to suggest is that quality is a movement towards accomplishment or excellence that is progressively achieved through iterative assessment procedures.

Educatodos had built, starting in 1995, a widespread and successful alternative education program for Honduras to enable the population excluded from the formal school system to complete their primary education (1st to 6th grade). Classes are managed by volunteer facilitators, and take place in any available setting near the home or the workplace, with the sponsorship of private business, NGO's, local governments, as well as educational institutions and schools.

Educatodos and IEQ started working together² in November 1999, in the development of curriculum materials for an alternative education delivery system for basic education of 7th to 9th grade. The curriculum mapping has been produced, for both formal and alternative programs, and an integrated curriculum approach is being used for development of print and audio learning materials. Similar materials are developed for teaching English as a second language.

ASSESSMENT FOR QUALITY IN LEARNING

Quality inasmuch as learning is concerned, involves the achievement of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes for life. Our goal is to produce quality curriculum and materials that assist young Hondurans to acquire basic learnings and competencies that improve their quality of life. That is an ambitious goal that requires the development of systematic processes that are applied and validated.

From the onset of the project, several assessment procedures have been established to assist in moving progressively closer to our goal of quality. Information from evaluations of learning is used for decision-making and for improvement of the learning process. Assessment procedures in place are the following.

- Self-assessment of learning throughout the learning materials. Continuous assessment exercises allow the learner to confirm and fortify his or her learning.

¹ IEQ: Improving Educational Quality

² Through a USAID funded project for reconstruction of Honduras after hurricane Mitch

- Assessing learning progress throughout the class year. Throughout the class year, that is programmed to last eight months, and at the end of each unit, assessment sessions and quizzes are included as part of the regular agenda. These sessions and quizzes are incorporated into the learning materials package, and facilitators are trained as to how to give feedback to participants.
- Assessing entry-level skills of participants starting at the grade. A study of all participants entering the program has been conducted to determine their profile in relation to what they should have learned in Mathematics and Communication skills from 2nd to 6 grade. This information is used to determine the objectives of remedial lessons to enable participants to start 7th grade on a better grounding, particularly considering that most have been out of school for several years.
- Assessing entry-level skills of volunteer facilitators starting with the program. Taking into consideration that facilitators managing the program are not required to be teachers, the entry-level test was also given to facilitators. This assessment has been particularly useful to determine content areas that require special attention in training for facilitators. Audio learning materials for facilitators are planned to teach Mathematics and Communications competencies that appear to be inadequate.
- Pre-testing and post-testing of seventh grade learning achievement. Entry-level tests and pre- and post-test have been developed and undertaken by the Unidad de Medicion de la Calidad Externa (UMCE) of the National Pedagogical University in Honduras. Entry-level tests have been developed based on standardized tests done countrywide. Seventh grade pre- and post-tests have been developed for the Project, and are the first done of this nature for this level in Honduras.
- Assessing learning for certification. Taking into account that the curriculum is integrated, focusing on participants' activities, assessment procedures for certification have been developed accordingly. The instruments are adjusted based on field-testing.

ASSESSMENT FOR QUALITY IN PROCESSES

Procedures have been put in place to lead the assessment of Project processes towards quality. The intent is that the Project be a learning environment, in which processes are tested, analyzed, and improved based on formative assessment procedures, participatory decision-making, and primarily field level experience. Examples of procedures assessed include the following.

- Learning materials testing. Field level testing of the text and audio learning materials has been undertaken regularly, through field visits by multidisciplinary teams of staff members. This has proved to be highly useful for better acquainting staff to field conditions and for making decisions regarding the learning quality of textbooks and audio programs.
- Baseline of participants and facilitators. A baseline study of socioeconomic conditions and basic data of participants has been conducted at the initiation of the seventh grade pilot phase. This data is to be used as an input to studies to be conducted, to allow the analysis of specific conditions of implementation in regard to population groups.
- Management and work plan review. Administrative procedures are also subject of analysis to reassess measures that require attention and adjustment.
- Alliances with stakeholders. The alliances with local and national stakeholders are essential for an alternative education program. The assessment of conditions of relationships with private business, as well as the effect of enhanced education efforts in the workplace will be of particular consideration for the sustainability of the program.

- Training and volunteerism. Facilitators in the program are volunteers that have at minimum a high school education, with little or no teaching experience. While volunteers bring with them the motivation and commitment to serve, they place a challenge to the program that has to build a system to be used by persons with multiple delivery competencies. Thus, the need to assess the social surroundings and support for volunteers, their training needs, and determine based on experience what are the optimum conditions for their continuity and performance.
- Capacity building. Institutional building of Educadodos is a main goal of the IEQ II Project. Nevertheless, the needs for institutional strengthening vary, due to the changing organizational environment. Thus, the Project has reassessed the capacity building process -through formal and informal procedures- refining its focus and making adjustments as needed.
- Tracer study of pilot centers and participants. A monitoring system has been used for over viewing the needs of pilot centers. This has assisted in decision-making for assisting centers that had particular challenges. The tracing of the participants is also planned to appraise the trail of learning and the variables associated with it.
- Assessment procedures. Evaluation and assessment procedures are also the subject of appraisal and review. This has been the case particularly for formative evaluation procedures, such as the case of field assessment of learning materials. Thus the procedures for assessment are progressively validated through field experience and application.

Our experience in trying to achieve quality is certainly not a finished product, nor a predefined road. It is more like a path -with iterative assessment and decision-making- that may bring us closer to efficient and effective processes and providing quality learning. We are not yet there, but we know we are on the way.